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622 [538] answer to questions and which gave an answer which seemed so foolish to the devil that she tore the oracle up by the roots.[4] He is perhaps a trifle too easy-going and a few people appear to take advantage of his good nature; the village, as opposed to some of its less prosperous neighbours, has considerable arrears of taxes; the Mandal himself is considerably in debt. When animals are slaughtered for sacrifice he is in great demand as butcher to distribute the different portions; everybody knows him to be fair and nobody questions his decisions on this or other matters of greater importance. He is very explicit about the main orientations of the culture; [183] for example, he explained that the help that will be given by everybody to poor or indebted men was a special Lepcha custom; 'and I think it is a very good one because it makes everybody realise that they are part of one group and the happiness of one is the happiness of all.'

622 781 In some respects Chala Mandal exaggerated the casualness with which all Lepchas, except lamas, treat the minor details of religious rites or the performance of ordinary actions. A constantly recurring phrase, which almost turns into a catchword, in Lepcha conversation is *ket ma-nin*—'it doesn't matter'. The grain isn't covered and the birds will get it—*ket ma-nin*. There is no dried fish and the offering ought to have it—*ket ma-nin*. Chala Mandal was completely sceptical about new-fangled notions, such as the danger to people or plants from menstruating women, which have been imported from outside.

622 In the event of the Mandal dying without a suitable heir the *youmi* (see below) will act as substitute until the householders have chosen one of their number to become Mandal; preference would probably be given to a member of the same *ptso* but there is no obligation to do so. When a unanimous choice has been decided upon the name will be submitted in a petition to the Rhennock Kazi. For two years the candidate will be on approval, and only after he has shown himself to be thoroughly satisfactory will his tenure of office be officially confirmed. Even when the new Mandal is closely related to the old one he must be formally elected by the householders and confirmed in office by the Maharajah and Kazi. The chief qualifications demanded of a Mandal are wisdom, character, popularity, and adequate wealth.

624 The offices of Muktair and Mandal can be held by lamas; the other two offices, *youmi* and *gyapŏn* can not, as these offices may

[4] See Appendix V, b.

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for women other than their wives produce and have produced many disquieting situations, sometimes leading to open disputes and even suicide.[10] Such disturbances can however be put down to uncontrollable personal temperaments, which go strongly against the Lepcha ideal of behaviour; the regulations of the Lepchas have been devised to reduce to a minimum the conflict and aggression within the group. This has not however been followed by added aggression to people outside the group; William Sumner's generalisation[11] does not hold good here, possibly because through the greater part of their history Lepchas have only had slight and intermittent contact with other groups. Practically all the aggression manifested by the Lepchas is directed against and is supposed to originate from hostile supernaturals. Historically Lepchas have nearly always answered outside aggression by retreating and hiding in the forest; and in the semi-historical stories which they recount about the invading Tibetans or Nepali or Bhutanese, the Lepchas get the better of their enemies, not by violence but by cunning—through cutting off the water supply, shooting fire into the fortress, blocking up mountain paths, and similar devices.

It is worth noting that the Lepchas who live in mixed communities, though they generally know of the theoretical right of access to potential spouses, all deny with great apparent sincerity that these rights are ever taken advantage of; many who have imbued the views of their neighbours the Tibetans or Nepali, regard them with horror. The Lepchas of Zongu themselves are culturally tolerant and know that their neighbours have different rules of conduct; for example the Tibetans forbid the marriage of aunt and nephew, but both they and the Nepali permit the marriage of first cousins which for the Lepchas is the most horrifying form of incest. The habits of other races, particularly the Tibetans, are a fairly constant subject of conversation; many of these habits are viewed with disgust, but disgust tempered by considerable amusement.

In the case of two or more marriages taking place within the same generation of two groups, the levirate and sororate claims are readjusted to meet the situation; for example if two brothers marry two sisters, the younger brother will not have the right of access to or be able to inherit his elder brother's wife, because she

[10] Instances of these disruptive situations are given further on in this chapter and in Chapter Fifteen.

[11] 'The relation of comradeship and peace in the we-group and that of hostility and war towards others-groups are correlative of each other.' W. Sumner: *Folkways* (Boston 1906), p. 12.

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597 adopted as children five show very considerable deviance from the Lepcha norm; Tikneum *youmi* is bad-tempered, especially with children (it will be remembered that he was the man who twice committed sodomy); Kurma has a desire for power, is boastful, and shows decided sadistic traits; Rigya is a horder who gloats over his hidden wealth; Agyung is surly and very rude and heartless towards his elders, and especially to his adopting father Serving, who is ninety and nearly blind; and Gongyop is extremely nervous. The sixth adopted adult, Chelim, appeared to me to be a normal and well-adjusted Lepcha; I did not have much contact with him and was unable to get his life-story.

885 The Lepcha manner of life is arranged on the supposition that birth and death will take place regularly and at the proper times; and when these suppositions are falsified by fact, readjustments, which often result in maladjustments, have to be made. The Lepchas plan for big households of four generations with the chief authority in the third generation; a man is thought to be in the prime of life and to be capable of exercising authority chiefly in his fourth and fifth cycles—that is between the ages of thirty-six and sixty. Before the age of about thirty-six Lepcha men are extremely un-self-reliant and diffident; they act as though they were unused to making decisions for themselves, almost as though they were not fully grown-up. Among the Lepchas I nearly always considerably under-estimated people's ages. After the age of sixty a man should be able to retire somewhat from the harder labours of life to be supported by his children and grandchildren.

183 592 Such is the ideal; but sterility and a very unevenly distributed death-rate destroy these expectations; old men find they have to work either because they have no sons, or else their sons are dead; children who should be living in a large family find themselves isolated. The ideal Lepcha household would consist of about sixteen people; in Lingthem the average is a little over five to a house. Only six households are relatively complete, and of these only two; the households of Tafoor and Ongden, are considered by other Lepchas to approach the ideal arrangement.